

Immigration Act, 1976

a leadership role. It is a role that must be played because the problem we are facing with these two small pieces of legislation are but the tip of a very significant global iceberg.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, what is so remarkable about questions being asked today by members of the Progressive Conservative Party is that they seem to be labouring under the impression that Canada has a minority Government that is in the hands of the Opposition or, alternatively, they seem to be labouring under the impression that only a few months have passed since they took office. These two strange notions must be put to rest.

Canadians know that there is a majority Government which is not in the hands of 73 members of the Opposition. The Government has the power to act and has exercised that political will on a few occasions. I suggest that 208 Progressive Conservative Members certainly have a strong weight when it comes to a vote against 73 opposition Members.

Second, when one considers almost three years of inactivity, it is peculiar to hear questions raised about the need for action. After all, it was not September, 1986 or September, 1985, but September, 1984 when Canadians gave a majority mandate to the Government. It has had the time to develop its measures and move them through Parliament.

One finds it very peculiar, to say the least, to hear the line of questions by Conservative Members who seem to be oblivious of these two major factors.

It is exactly one year today, on August 11, 1986, when 155 Tamils landed in Newfoundland. It is a very strange coincidence that this debate is taking place today. I find it very interesting and educational to see two pages in today's *Toronto Star* devoted to biographies of some 65 of those Tamils. I will read only the first biographical sketch accompanying the picture of Annamalai Kamaleswaran. It states that Annamalai Kamaleswaran had to leave his family to save it. In Sri Lanka, the 23-year-old Tamil refugee was preparing to study commerce in university but he said that the civil war forced his family to depend on relatives for support. Now Kamaleswaran operates a dyeing machine in a Montreal textile factory 12 hours a day, 72 hours a week, and sends about \$500 a month to feed four brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents.

Page after page and picture after picture provide a very interesting human story about the sublime and the difficulty that a newly arrived person goes through when settling in this very hospitable and generous country of ours.

Against this context, it is difficult to understand why the Government would like Canadians to believe that until June, 1987, Bill C-55 was to be the answer to a problem and, second, that the Government would like Canadians to believe that we have a crisis on hand.

I will briefly try to deal with both assumptions by the Government and prove that both claims are inspired by incompetence, confusion, and by near panic.

• (1740)

Let me first deal with the Bill before us today for debate. Between September, 1984 and May, 1985 the Government did nothing. As other speakers have indicated, the Government came to power with the benefit of a number of reports on the question of how to handle the flow of refugees. Individuals and institutions have produced documentation and studies for the benefit of Government, but not until May 5 of this year did the Government bring in a piece of legislation and not until June 18 of this year, if I remember correctly, did the Government decide to put forward for discussion in this House this measure, a measure which certainly raises a lot of questions. We received cables, letters and telephone calls. We made appointments on weekends in our constituency offices to speak to people who expressed their opposition or at least their concerns about Bill C-55. I am sure Members on the Conservative side have received the same kind of signals.

Why did that happen? It happened because in the Bill as drafted certain international obligations of Canada were denied, overlooked or ignored. The appeal procedure was faulty. It was an initiative which really upset and frustrated a lot of people in this field, including church organizations and volunteer organizations which help immigrants and refugees. They all said they did not approve of the notion that Canada should return a person who claims the status of refugee in Canada, after having visited for a while in another country, to a country which is not his or her own and where that person has no hope whatsoever of starting a new life. Therefore this procedure was not acceptable. It was on these three important grounds that our immigration critic asked questions and fought the measure, and then, in understandable frustration, put forward a motion for a six month hoist. That was very understandable.

We have here a credibility gap. It is a gap which reinforces the notion among Canadians that this Government cannot be trusted in what it says. It cannot be trusted when it claims it cannot pass legislation. It cannot be trusted when it tries to make Canadians believe that the Opposition can stop the legislation it puts forward. That is the substance of this credibility gap. There is a credibility gap both in the process and in the content of the measure this Government has attempted to put forward.

The Government has been in power for almost three years and, as I said, the measure it is proposing is being objected to by church organizations and voluntary groups, and it flies in the face of international commitments that Canada has made over decades to other countries.

It was not for nothing that the Governor General of Canada on November 13, 1986, received on behalf of Canadians from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees the Nansen Medal in recognition of what Canadians have done to help refugees in previous years. Under the Tory administration I doubt very much we will ever qualify again to receive such an